linked to the regenerative ideology of the ritual.

Generally I feel Carucci is ethno-graphically right, but at times he seems too right as he neatly fits together all the pieces of the ritual and cultural life of the Marshall Islanders. In an attempt to cast widely the ethno-graphic gaze, one wonders if this method does not obligate the ethnographer to fit all the pieces of culture and history into a tidy integrative system of meanings and social practices. Part of the vibrancy of culture lies in how, from one context to the next, social actors generate meanings that are multiple and flexible. Carucci does show how meanings shift and, as emergent products, are produced and reproduced through time. However, the slippage between the sense-making of the ethnographer and the “native’s” sense, no matter how informed by intersubjective understandings, cau-
tions that disparate activities and sym-bols may not always refer back to a semiotic center. Nonetheless, to see the “order of things” from the Islanders’ perspective Carucci has been more than thorough and insightful. He has presented a reading that brings closer the experience and worldview of the Marshall Islanders.

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The gauntlet was thrown by Gregory Bateson, who termed the Baining “unstudiable,” a challenge confirmed forty years later by Jeremy Pool, who considered himself to have discovered no “area of central anthropological concern” that could be fruitfully explored among the Baining. Jane Fajans accepted this challenge. In the process of over two years of cumulative fieldwork in the late seventies and early nineties, she discovered first, that her method of study had to rely on observation and participation much more heavily than informants’ exe-gesis, and second, that anthropological analysis of Baining culture would have to emphasize process and interaction rather than form and structure. Fajans is scrupulous about informing readers of her own interpretative process and the bases for her analysis. Interestingly enough, she tells us that rather than having the main symbolic elements of Baining culture lavishly displayed in ritual sequences and later confirmed or enriched through the study of daily life, as many ethnographers seem to do, among the Baining it was necessary to fully understand the values and actions that informed daily life and most of all the socialization process before she could make any headway on understanding the fantastic and
flamboyant dance complexes for which the group is famous.

The first half of Fajans’ discussion centers on the work of daily life, emphasizing in the review of Baining history the remarkable resilience of the culture, through periods of exploitation by their Tolai neighbors, missionization, the inroads of colonial plantations, World War Two, repeated attempts by various administrations to settle them in larger villages and to persuade them to engage in cash cropping, and the introduction of Melanesian Pidgin and schools. Nevertheless, they continue to live mainly by subsistence gardening, which leads them to remain dispersed in small hamlets and garden houses. The Baining consider the bush or forest to be in many ways the antithesis of hamlet life—chaotic, dangerous, asocial. Through the work of gardening, food giving, and adoption, they transform the natural into the social. Lacking any kind of corporate groups, enduring descent patterns, or rites of passage, through work they continually produce persons, family, and community, which nevertheless remain vulnerable to dissipation and reversion into the natural. Young children are viewed as distinctly asocial entities who need to be discouraged from playing and taught to work. As young adults they first become workers who assist in producing food, then as married couples and eventually parents, they become sufficient food producers and socializers of others. Old age is considered a return to a childlike state, in which one must be cared for by others and eventually at death return to the realm of the natural. Adoption signifies bonds created through purely social means (namely, feeding) and is highly valued. While birth, with its close associations to natural processes, is diminished in importance, the rupture of social relations at death is addressed extensively in ritual and signified by individuals’ observances of food taboos that reverse aspects of the normal production of social relationships through food-giving.

In contrast to their steadfast round of daily work in the gardens and the intimacy of family and hamlet existence, during periods of plenty the Baining spend a great deal of time and energy at what they call “playing,” producing fantastic and ephemeral dance costumes from bush materials that are destroyed at the end of the day- or night-long performances. While men produce the costumes in special ritual spaces in the bush and eventually wear them to perform, women rehearse the songs in the village and make skirts with which to adorn themselves and the dancers. At the actual performance, the women participate as orchestra and audience and accompany the masked dancers by dancing in a circle around the outside. This elaborate and extended “play” brings into the same domain natural and social elements that normally exist in contrast to each other. In the dance, however, it is the transformation of one into the other that is performed. Fajans traces the multivalent messages of many different components of the dance to show how the Baining cosmology of “nature into culture and back again,” figured in bodily
processes in daily life, is here worked on the virtual bodies of the mask figures.

Finally, Fajans suggests that Baining society and culture challenge Bourdieu’s concept of the “habitus,” which entails assumptions both of social patterning of bodily activities at an unconscious level and of dominance-seeking social actors. The Baining, she says, produce themselves self-consciously and do not assume that anything about social life occurs “naturally,” that is, without intention and work. In this work of producing and reproducing themselves and society they are radically egalitarian, as evidenced by their preference for adoptive ties (non–gender-specific reproduction) over biological ones.

The discussion of Baining play might have benefited from reference to some of the theoretical literature on play that highlights the extent to which play depends on creating a frame that both separates and conjoins it with “real,” mundane life, thus enabling it to function as a metacommentary at multiple levels. The fervor with which the Baining play, and with which they seem steadfastly to resist explicating the process, suggests that it embodies important paradoxes—expressing necessary transgressions of the social–natural boundaries—whose “reality” or “truth value” would be seriously undermined by explanation.

Given the well-documented difficulty of analyzing a cultural way of life that expresses itself in such radically different ways and without any tradition of exegesis, introspection, or even gossip, Fajans is to be congratulated for providing these insights into how Baining actors make their very distinctive world.

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This remarkable book is a study of the demise of a men’s cult in Papua New Guinea during the mid-1980s. Many communities in Papua New Guinea over the past century have abandoned male initiation ceremonies, willingly or otherwise. But this monograph is the only detailed firsthand examination of such an event. The location of the study is the Arapesh settlement of Ilahita, one of the largest indigenous village communities in Papua New Guinea. Tuzin first carried out research there in the early 1970s, producing a highly regarded series of publications on the rich and complex male initiation system and its associated social organization, art, ritual, and architecture. The cult—called Tambaran in Pidgin—permeated all aspects of Ilahita people’s lives and was central to